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By PRESTON KNIGHT



*Michael Knapp plans to attend the University of Virginia and wants to become a surgeon or an anesthesiologist. (Photo by Jason Lenhart)*

**HARRISONBURG** — The town of Mount Jackson deeded a “colored cemetery” to black residents in the 1820s, but close to two centuries later, some credit for its preservation goes to Harrisonburg teen Michael Knapp.

That’s the kind of impact the 17-year-old aspiring surgeon has already made on strangers.

Knapp read a story in the Daily News-Record two years ago about how Mount Jackson resident DeLois Warr was almost single-handedly keeping the cemetery preserved and figured there was no harm in asking to help, which he later did by providing landscaping and erecting a fence.

It was his Eagle Scout project, made possible with help from his father and Scout troop.

“She was a pleasure to work with,” Knapp said of Warr. “I was pretty surprised nobody else reached out to help her.”

Knapp, one of four finalists for Harrisonburg High School’s 2014 DN-R Leadership Award, will head to the University of Virginia in the fall to pursue a career in helping others — as a surgeon or an anesthesiologist.

He likes the proximity the Charlottesville school will provide to home, but also the fact it is “strong” in the sciences.

“I just like the spirit of the campus. It’s very energetic,” said Knapp, the son of Thomas and Kristin Knapp.

He has shadowed an anesthesiologist at Sentara RMH Medical Center and is mentoring now at the Harrisonburg Community Health Center.

The experiences merge his love of biology and desire to help people, Knapp said.

He’s also spent time testing chemicals in Blacks Run and has overseen the technical setup for events in the HHS auditorium.

Knapp carries a 4.2 GPA, while also ranking 16th out of his class of 388 seniors.

“Michael has an uncanny ability to get people to work with him,” biology teacher Gehrie Bair said. “He is a great manager of his lab groups. He will help to get the lab going and before long his group is looking to him to assign jobs and keep things running. Many times without his help, his group would have fallen apart.”

The same might also apply to a certain Shenandoah County cemetery.

Said Knapp: “I was more than happy” to help with its restoration.

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